

## Case Study

# Conwy Community Car Scheme

Conwy Community Car Scheme is being developed as a direct result of need identified by a cluster of GP surgeries in Conwy. The number of primary and secondary care appointments being missed – known by GP's as DNAs, or 'Did Not Attend' appointments – is such that the Practice Managers in the cluster approached Community and Voluntary Support Conwy (CVSC) to explore the potential to develop a new scheme to help patients to better access their appointments.

Geraint Davies, the Health and Wellbeing Facilitator for CVSC, said that for example in Betws-Y-Coed “public transport is almost non-existent. With only one bus a week, patients had no options for appointment times and the local surgery had to ‘turn around’ appointments within an hour to allow people to get the bus home.” This was having a negative impact on both the patients and the surgery, forcing people to rush through consultations and creating delays for other patients. With some of Wales’ most rural and mountainous landscapes, an ageing population where more than 25% of residents are over 65 and low levels of both private car ownership and funding for traditional public transport, an innovative approach is needed to support patients to have greater choice and control over their health appointments.

### Identifying the need

Although there is no published data on primary care appointments, in developing the project CVSC found that some 52,800 secondary care appointments with Betsi Cadwallader University Health Board were missed by patients from Conwy West in 2015-16, at an estimated cost of £9.56m. The Practice Managers estimate that over 10% of these appointments were missed because of a lack of accessible transport options in the area.

Pulling on the experiences of another recently-established community car scheme and a local volunteer-led prescription delivery service, the partners identified that factors such as low income, restrictive eligibility for Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT), additional mobility needs and a lack of public transport means that residents are highly reliant on family, friends and neighbours to get to appointments. In practice, this means that often people are making choices about what to ask for help with, potentially sacrificing their mental health by giving up visiting friends in order to be able to get to regular hospital appointments.

In developing the project, CVSC held meetings with Practice Managers and community groups, had discussions with local community navigators and residents, and consulted with the Community Transport Association about cost effective models of transport for smaller communities in rural areas. Engaging with such a wide range of stakeholders was an invaluable exercise in helping them to define the problem (difficulties accessing medical services and appointments, and local facilities including health and wellbeing services) and in considering different options before agreeing on a preferred model - the community car scheme.

## **Developing the solution**

The emerging project is a truly needs-led, innovative solution which will not only tackle the problems identified, but will have a much wider impact on the rural wards of Conwy. Working in close partnership with CTA's Connecting Communities in Wales project, both GP surgeries in the cluster and the existing volunteer schemes, CVSC have secured funding through the Lottery Community Fund and the Steve Morgan Foundation to set up a volunteer car scheme and lease an accessible vehicle. Initially prioritising health appointments and based 50/50 between the two surgeries, as the service grows the partners will also be able to support people to access other wellbeing appointments, improving the mobility of isolated residents by providing affordable, accessible transport.

Volunteering is a key component of the project - there will be volunteer driver opportunities for the community car scheme and also for volunteer drivers who are willing to use their own cars to provide transport. Additional volunteer roles include: travel buddies to accompany people who may need support on their journeys due to ill health, disability, or low confidence; and ambassadors to help promote the scheme in the villages so that as many local people as possible know about the service and are able to access it.

The project will enhance the community by providing an interesting range of volunteering opportunities and a community resource (the community car) that helps people get to where they want to go, providing a door-to-door service that will mean people can access services regardless of any age, health, or mobility issues. As CVSC will be using the project to identify learning and critical success factors, they intend to share 'what works' with other rural communities facing similar challenges.

**The Conwy Community Car Scheme** recruited their new Project Co-ordinator in July 2019, and the service will be launching this Autumn.